

Women United, Women Divided: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Female Solidarity

Edited by Pat Caplan and Janet Bujra
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Cover Blurbs

In a collection of nine articles written about widely differing societies in India, East and West Africa, Australia, China, the West Indies, and Britain, the authors in this volume explore a much neglected area of the social sciences – relationship between women. They look at the way in which women exhibit solidarity with one another, the extent to which such solidarity is used by them, unconsciously or consciously, to ameliorate or change their position vis-à-vis men.

There is a wide diversity in the extent to which the societies studied do manifest any form of female solidarity ranging from China, where women's solidarity groups have been active since the Revolution, to the French West Indies, where women not only fail to exhibit any solidarity but are even mutually antagonistic towards one another. The authors have looked for reasons to account for these differences, using as a crucial variable the sexual segregation that was found to be present in varying degrees in all the societies studied.

The articles are prefaced by an introduction by Janet Bujra in which she draws together some of the findings in the book and, at the same time, casts a fresh perspective on relationships between women. Bujra uses as a mediating concept the idea of domestic labour, which has previously been employed only in discussions on women in western societies. By analysing the relationship between domestic labour and the mode of production of which it is a part, it is possible to comprehend the pre-conditions for the emergent feminist consciousness.

Preface

Although this book has two editors, it is in fact very much a collective work. It has its origins in the London Women's Anthropology Group which met regularly for two years between 1972 and 1974, during which time the possibility of compiling a book was mooted on several occasions. However, with the departure of several members of that group to the field, and others to jobs in different parts of the country, the group disbanded.

In the spring of 1977, a group of women anthropologists and sociologists, several of whom had been active in that group, began meeting to work out ideas for a collection of articles on various aspects of female solidarity. Our aim was to produce a book that would contribute to the growing academic debate on women, and yet at the same time be accessible and relevant to matters of concern to the Women's Movement.

We agreed to circulate our papers to one another, and to meet regularly to discuss our work. In spite of not being able to do this as often as we should have liked, we did manage to discuss our theme of solidarity at some length, and most of the authors in this collection benefited from the comments and views of their sister contributors. Although inevitable, individual perspectives and approaches differ, we have to acknowledge the mutual strength and support that we drew from each other.